

**THANKS-GIVING**  
2 Corinthians 8:1-15  
Grace Church / 11-28-10

**Introduction:**

I am sure many of you, just as Lea and I have, have received numerous requests for a financial gift in the past several weeks. Most of the requests we receive are from great organizations. Ministries that are doing good jobs at what they do to minister to a particular part of our society. We have responded to several of these requests in just the past week and would like to help each one if that were possible. Whatever we give and to whomever it is given we should have several goals in mind.

1. To be good stewards of all that God has given to us,
2. To give it wisely,
3. To give cheerfully
4. To give in such a manner that God is glorified.

You could say when we give in such a manner; it is an act of “Thanks-Giving”. That is the title I have chosen for our worship in the Word this morning, THANKS GIVING.

As I purpose to do each November, again this morning I desire to bring to your attention through our study of the Word of God several messages on the subject of stewardship. Stewardship could be of our time, our abilities, the environment and our finances. I have chosen to concentrate on the monetary side of stewardship for our Thanksgiving weekend study of God’s Word.

Guests, I apologize if this is your first time here. I do not speak often of finances from the pulpit. As I stated earlier, each November I purpose to bring a message around the stewardship of our finances. My desire is to share with you from a perspective of stewardship of all that God has entrusted to us, not just participation in a Sunday offering.

Let me say at this point, I do not handle any of the money that comes in to Grace, neither do any of the other pastors. A deacon of finance and a treasurer at Grace oversees the funds here. This is a good place for me to publicly say thank you to Steve Kern for his many years of excellent service as our Deacon of Finance. He has placed us on a level of financial integrity that many churches never achieve.

The important thing this morning is not what people think or what others may do but what does God have to say about one of most important area of our lives? Long before MAKEMERICH.COM came into being God had some key things to say about how we are to use the material possessions of this world.

That is what I want us to do this morning. I would like for us to ask of Scripture “what is it that God has to say about stewardship in this area of life”? **Please do not misunderstand; Grace is not in a financial crisis. I simply desire, as your pastor, to present to you the full counsel of God for every area of our lives.**

Let's discover together what a biblical theology of material possessions ought to be. What is it that pleases God? Where can I build a solid theology of how to use the things of this world in such a fashion that God is glorified?

We will begin in the Old Testament and walk through to the New. It is important that not only your fingers do the walking but that our hearts would also walk through the pages of God's word. It is good for us to see the inner canonical connections between the old and new testaments.

### Giving as described in the Old Testament.

Let's begin with Genesis 14:18-20. Most of us have heard the term "tithe" before. If not let me give you a brief definition. The word translated tithe in the bible is simply the word for tenth. Harpers Bible Dictionary puts it this way "a tenth part of one's yearly income set aside for sacral purposes".

The first time we see the concept of tithing is in Genesis 14:17-20.

17 After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.) 19 And he blessed him and said,

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
Possessor of heaven and earth;  
20 and blessed be God Most High,  
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Here we find Abram, the man whom God had chosen from the land of Ur to become the father of the Israelite nation. Ur is believed to be located in southern Iraq. Abram, whose name was later changed to Abraham, has gone to rescue his nephew Lot. Lot and his family along with many others from the city of Sodom have been taken captive by the king Chedorlaomer. With 300 men Abram defeats Chedorlaomer, and rescues Lot and his family along with all the stolen goods from Sodom. On the trip home Abraham runs into a mysterious man by the name of Melchizedek who is called a priest of the Most High God. Let me give you the abbreviated version this morning, Abraham gives to Melchizedek a tenth of all that he has taken. It is not paid as bribe money or a tariff of any kind but as an act of gratitude on Abraham's part. So the first we see of tithing in the bible is not a paying of God to stir Him to bless us but as an act of worship and gratitude for all that God has done.

It says here that Melchizedek was priest of God Most High. We do not know much more than this about Melchizedek. Psalm 110:4 reveals to us that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, will be a priest

forever after the order of Melchizedek. The book of Hebrews reveals to us that Melchizedek was a priest that was higher than the Levitical priest. He was no run of the mill pastor.

Let us go a bit further down the road of tithing. The next place that it shows up is in the life of Jacob. Jacob is Abraham's grandson. Jacob had a dream in which God promised to bless him far beyond his wildest dreams. In response to God's promise Jacob says:

Genesis 28:22 (ESV)

22 "and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you."

It is important for us to note that Jacob recognizes everything he has is a gift from God. The tithe that he pays is not taken from anything that he has been able to obtain for himself. Rather the statement seems to indicate that everything we possess is a result of what God has given to us. We are therefore God's stewards. Thus we have the term stewardship. That is, my oversight of a trust fund that belongs not to me but to God. Jacob's giving of a tithe to God should not be seen as a payment of a tenth and then the liberty of using the 90% for any purpose at all. Rather when a tithe of burnt offering or some other sacrifice is made in the temple, it is simply an acknowledgement that we recognize it all belongs to God.

The next time we encounter the concept of tithing is when Moses is leading the nation of Israel. God has instructed Moses to make it a part of the Law for the nation of Israel. Leviticus 27:30-33 reads;

Leviticus 27:30-33 (ESV)

30 "Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD's; it is holy to the LORD. 31 If a man wishes to redeem some of his tithe, he shall add a fifth to it. 32 And every tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff, shall be holy to the LORD. 33 One shall not differentiate between good or bad, neither shall he make a substitute for it; and if he does substitute for it, then both it and the substitute shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed."

This is very specific as to what was to be tithed. Every thing that was a product of the field, i.e. grain, the fruit from trees and the livestock was to be tithed.

We are given more instruction in Deuteronomy 14:22-29 as to how the tithe was to be given and what it was for. I will not take time to read the entire section but I would like to point out several observations we can make from this passage. So could you turn with me and follow along in your bibles?

1. Deuteronomy 14:22 (ESV)

22 "You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field **year by year**."

According to verse twenty-two there was a yearly trip to the holy place. Notice that in delivering their tithe it was not like a drive-thru deposit at the bank. It was not simply a

placing of funds in an offering plate. But rather it was much more involved than that. The person bringing the tithe of grain would actually sit down and have a feast with part of it. It was a joyous occasion. It was a time of being physically involved in worship. It was not simply a duty of paying the priest and sustaining the temple. Rather it was an expression of joy and gratitude. It is important that we understand, God did not need the tithe. God was not in financial need but was providing an opportunity for us to seek Him and fellowship with Him.

2. At the end of verse twenty-three we discover the reason for the tithing feast. Look in your text please as I read it. Deuteronomy 14:23 (ESV)

23 And before the LORD your God, in the place that he will choose, to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock, **that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.**

Tithing was simply a way of remembering that all we possess belongs to God in the first and last place.

3. A third item that is important to observe is found in verse 27.

Deuteronomy 14:27 (ESV)

27 And you shall **not neglect the Levite** who is within your towns, for he has no portion or inheritance with you.

The tithe was given not only in a celebration feast but also **to support the priest** whom God had chosen to serve the people. The Levites, from the tribe of Levi were scattered throughout the land by God's design in order to serve the nation of Israel in a priestly role. Their only means of support was a portion of what was brought to the temple.

4. Verses 28 and 29 give further direction as to how the tithe was to be used. Not only was it used in a feast of celebration and to support those who were priests but several other categories of people were to be blessed in the giving of the tithe. Look with me again at the text.

Deuteronomy 14:28–29 (ESV)

28 “At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. 29 And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the **sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow**, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.

5. The fifth and final observation I would like to make is found at the end of verse 29. , and so that the LORD your **God may bless you** in all the work of your hands that you do.

Here is a promise from God to bless those who honor Him in every area of their lives. It is not MAKEMERICH.GOD but rather a faithful promise from our creator to take care of the needs of those who love Him. It is not that God is in need of any tithe or gift but rather He is honored by the way we treat those around us when we do it in His name.

The promise is not to make us rich but that those who love God and trust Him enough to honor him with at least a tithe will never lack the resources they need. That principle is still true for us today.

Let me summarize this section of tithing in the Old Testament. It goes back to the very beginning of Israel's history. It was practiced before the giving of the Law through Moses and seems to have been an expression of gratitude to God who is the giver and sustainer of all life. That it was practiced before the Law was given should indicate to us that tithing cannot simply be discarded by saying it was a practice of Jews worshipping according to the Law. What Abraham and Jacob practiced became part of the Mosaic Law and part of Israel's worship of God. It was designed to support the priest, and help those in need. It was a spiritual feast to celebrate God's goodness and taught the giver to hold God in reverence. It was used to support various benevolent ministries.

We could go on tracing this through the Old Testament but I think perhaps this gives to us the essential purpose of the tithe.

#### **Giving as described in the New Testament**

**Let's now turn our attention to the matter of financial stewardship in the New Testament.** What does all of this mean for you and me; followers of the Most High God in the year 2010?

While we can say through the nation of Israel God will bless all the inhabitants of the world, when we get to the New Testament, Christ adds a new dimension to this missionary effort. The offer of eternal life bought through Christ's death and resurrection, has now become the responsibility of the Church taking that invitation to every corner of the globe. This going and inviting involves stewardship. It involves the giving of ourselves. Not only in the area of finances but in every area of our lives. It is stewardship of our time, our prayers, and our labor of love. It is the offering of our children to reaching those in a dying world and teaching them how to become a part of Gods living Church. It is the equipping of our youth for the work of the ministry in Memphis or Romania. It is the enabling of all to reach their OIKOS.

It seems to me there is something common in most of us. It is the longing of the human heart to live a life that has value to it. Most of us would like to think that the epitaph on our tombstones would indicate that our lives have counted for something. We want to have made investments in eternal matters.

Each of us has been bought with a price. There was a supreme sacrifice made so that through faith individuals might have a relationship with God.

1 Corinthians 6:20 (NIV)

20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

1 Corinthians 7:23 (NIV)

23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

God has placed a value on each of our lives. That is why He was willing to buy us with the price of His Son, a price which required death. A resurrection purchased through the power of God to overcome sin and death.

The result has been spiritual hope, physical and spiritual sustenance for every person that trust in Christ to pay the penalty for their sin. The responsibility that we have to take that message of hope to the billions of the world is so stupendous it is not settled by what we give according to a fixed percentage such as the tithe. It requires much more than dollars, it requires all that I am.

In a world that is straining under pressure at every point of longitude and latitude, the question is not **“how much will I give”** but rather **“how much dare I spend on myself”**.

I suppose we could say that for the follower of Christ today, tithing is the training wheels to a lifestyle of giving and giving and giving. We are to be a conduit of God’s blessing to others.

You see, here is the reality that every one of us must come to terms with. Nothing belongs to us in an eternal sense. The next breathe that my body is longing for and which I take for granted is not mine but a gift from God. Most of us are familiar with Psalm 23. It is often quoted in time when death is pending. It has brought hope and comfort to many. We love the green pastures provided for us to lie in. We enjoy drinking from the cup that over flows. We relax in the security of being protected from our enemies. Even to the point of forgetting where it all has come from.

Along with Psalm 23 we ought to commit to memory Psalm 24 which begins:

Psalm 24:1–3 (ESV)

1 The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof,  
the world and those who dwell therein,

2 for he has founded it upon the seas  
and established it upon the rivers.

3 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?  
And who shall stand in his holy place?

It is a Biblical truth beyond all dispute, that all of our possessions are from God (Ps. 24:1) and has been loaned to us as stewards to use in ways that maximize the glorification of God’s mercy in the world (Matt. 25:14-30). It is irrational to think that giving ten percent of that money to the church settles the issue of good stewardship. In a world of such immense need, and in a country of such immense luxury, and under the commission of such a powerful Lord the issue of stewardship is not: Shall I tithe?, but rather, How much of God’s trust fund dare I use to surround myself with comforts?

Even in light of the great needs of the world there is still a more compelling reason to give my all to God. He as the Creator requires it. To give my all is an act of obedience extending out of my love for the one who is the author and finisher of my faith.

Lea and I have practiced in our own giving the principle of at least ten percent for many years. However, to only commend the financial side of our stewardship as tithing simply does not capture the theme of N. T. teaching on stewardship. Rather we find that the emphasis in the New Testament is on abundantly living and abundant giving.

I want to direct your attention to another section of Scripture and draw from it several principles that should be the foundation of how I disperse the funds God has entrusted to my care. Turn with me please in your bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 8. I will not take a lot of time here but would like to highlight for us what it means as a follower of Christ to progress to a place in my financial stewardship where I have discarded the training wheels of tithing for the spiritual act of Thanks Giving. Here are five principles to guide us in this holiday season and every day following.

1. We can give even in the midst of an economic down turn.

2 Corinthians 8:1–2 (ESV)

8 We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for **in a severe test of affliction**, their abundance of joy and **their extreme poverty** have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

The believers in Macedonia gave even out of the severest of financial crisis. If you wait until you think you are able to give, it is likely you never will. Studies reveal the higher the income the lower the percentage of giving.

2. We are to give enthusiastically considering it a privilege to do so.

2 Corinthians 8:3–4 (ESV) 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 **begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—**

The believers in Macedonia needed no prodding to give. They were seeking an opportunity, even to the point of begging that they would be allowed the favor of giving.

3. The standard for our giving is our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 8:5–9 (ESV)

5 and this, not as we expected, but they **gave themselves first to the Lord** and then by the will of God to us. 6 Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. 7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also.

8 I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 9 For you know the grace of our **Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor**, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

When we have given ourselves first to the Lord, we will have no problem giving out of our finances to God as we give to others. Whether it be to the local church where you participate or to others as you see need.

Warren Wiersbe puts it this way. “That we might become rich! This suggests that we were poor before we met Jesus Christ, and we were---totally bankrupt. But now that we have trusted Him, we share in all His riches! WE are now the children of God, “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:17). Since this is true, how can we refuse to give to others? He became poor to make us rich! Can we not follow His example, as did the Macedonian churches, who out of their deep poverty abounded in liberality?”

4. Our giving is to be from a position of willingness.

2 Corinthians 8:10–12 (ESV)

10 And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but **also to desire to do it**. 11 So now finish doing it as well, so that **your readiness** in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. 12 For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

There are times we have the desire to give but fail to squeeze the trigger to do so.

5. Our giving is to be an act of faith strengthened through grace.

2 Corinthians 8:13–15 (ESV)

13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness 14 **your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness**. 15 As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”

While the word “faith” does not appear in the text at this point, it seems to me that faith undergirds their act of giving rather than hoarding. They were encouraged to trust God to meet everyone’s need.

**“if we obey it is easier to have faith and the more faith you have the easier it is to obey.”**

**So What?**

As we experience this special time of thanksgiving and the Christmas season perhaps we can keep in mind that all of what we have belongs to God. I want to exhort you to cultivate the attitude and action of THANKS GIVING!

We have been entrusted as His stewards to dispense of it in the above five ways.

1. Purposefully
2. Regularly
3. Sacrificially
4. Cheerfully
5. Trustingly

We need to remember Jesus did not negate tithing, He simply took it to another level as He did many other things. Here are a few examples.

Luke 3:11 (ESV)

11 And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.”

Luke 19:8 (ESV)

8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”

Matthew 19:21 (ESV)

21 Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

Luke 14:33 (ESV)

33 So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Acts 2:44 (ESV)

44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

Acts 4:34 (ESV)

34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold

The issue for the New Testament follower of Christ is not “how much will I give” but rather “how much dare I keep”.